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ABSTRACT

This paper briefly reviews recent reading research which is based on the concept of first identifying effective reading teachers in terms of students' reading achievement and then considering process variables (instructional strategies) which could account for the students' achievement It is suggested that the advantage of this research approach over approaches which identify variables and then attempt to establish a relationship to student achievement is that the variables under investigation deal more directly with those which relate to student achievement, and this direct relationship is important if progress is to be made toward identifying the effective reading teacher in relation to the total reading program. (LL)

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Credible Variables Which Relate to Teacher Effectiveness in Reading Instruction

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Identification of those variables which can be associated with an effective elementary reading program is, with our current knowledge base, a challenging endeavor. The teacher, administrator, or researcher who attempts to select and incorporate into a reading program variables that assure an effective program would soon discover that well delineated indicators of reading program effectiveness do not exist. Further examination of the literature on reading program effectiveness would reveal that the most important variable, with respect to students' reading achievement, when methods, materials, grouping practices and so on, are compared is the teacher (Bond and Dykstra, 1967). Even though the potency of teacher influence becomes more credible when supported by empirical validation, it is not a surprising revelation. Anyone who has been involved in American education suspects that the teacher ultimately determines the effectiveness of a reading program.

Why then has much of the reading research focused on influences other than the teacher? Some reading authorities have held that teaching reading is a complex art which varies with the student, environment, materials, and so forth. Others have been reluctant to attribute learners' end-of-year reading score improvement to individual teacher effectiveness. Still others have been committed to research designs that dictate the variables under investigation, which ultimately results in methodological incarceration.

The view that teaching is a complex art involving interactions among a host of variables, in which the teacher is but one of these interacting components, may be a resonable explanation for a reading program being effective. However, for such a position to be credible and accepted as casual, it must be supported by empirical data. Brophy (1972) contends that this view is held by those who do not believe student achievement gain to be an important measure of teacher effectiveness. He points out that this position may be perpetuated by researchers' failure to demonstrate a clear relationship between teaching behaviors and student achievement.

From a logical viewpoint, effective reading instruction is more likely the result of a teacher's acquired skills and knowledge, than it is the result of some ability which only a few teachers may possess. Thus, logic should serve as the motivator which encourages the search for identifying teacher behaviors which relate to effective reading instruction.

Another factor which may account for the lack of information about the characteristics of the effective teacher of reading relates to the variables which have been investigated. Assessments of teacher effectiveness have employed a variety of measurement techniques. For example, self-ratings, direct observation, objective instrument, and interviewing techniques have been used. Most of these research studies have failed to identify the attributes of an effective teacher (Biddle, 1964).

Rather than looking at the best criterion by which to judge teacher competence, a change in the learner's behavior, researchers have used more readily available criteria hoping that these relate to outcome criterion (McNeil and Popham, 1973). This research approach may be related to the accessibility of frequently used variables. For example, course work, grooming, friendliness, letters of recommendation, and so forth are readily identifiable variables. Once they are identified, they can be related to some aspect of student's reading achievement. However, the end result of such studies is a "puzzle phenomenon" -- just bits and pieces. Attempts to fit them together to say something meaningful about the total reading program are almost certain to fail. The puzzle phenomenon could be partially eliminated by employing a research approach which first identifies the effective teacher of reading in relation to an outcome measure and then examines viable process variables (teaching strategies) that could explain students' reading achievement (product variables).

Finally, methodological incarceration probably contributes more to our difficulty in answering the "What are the characteristics of a good teacher of

reading" than the two previously mentioned considerations. Education research deals with advancing logical hypotheses for explaining why something is the way it is -- a problem is identified and research is initiated to move closer to understanding that problem. However, frequently investigators become more concerned about the sophistication of the research design rather than moving toward a better understanding of the problem. When the emphasis is placed on methodological considerations many researchers become incarcerated in terms of how they can analyze the data and what final decisions can be reached. It may be that the currently available research methodology is not able to cope with investigations designed to identify effective teaching of reading. As the editors of the Reading Research Quarterly (1974-75) point out, "... most of the available designs are based on the notion that the researcher knows what he is looking for and indeed he is forced to explicitly define the variables and relationships before he begins to collect his data. The researcher is forced into the strategy of studying what fits into current statistical techniques rather than what the important issues are." (p. ii).

Although most of what is known about effective reading instruction is in terms of the "puzzle phenomenon," there do exist a minimal number of research findings and presently operative effective reading programs which could form the bases for further exploration. In addition, many of the bits and pieces of research about teacher effectiveness in reading could become more meaningful if research methodologies are adopted which allow for the investigation of how these bits and pieces contribute to teacher effectiveness in a total reading program.

Some of the research findings regarding effective reading instruction, which related process to product (e.g. teacher instructional variables whose effectiveness was measured by learner performance on reading competency measures) include investigation conducted by Pescosolido (1962), Harris

and Serwer (1966), Weber (1971), Rupley (1974), and Blair (1974).

Seven factors related to teaching procedures in reading were identified by Pescosolido as being highly related to pupil achievement in reading. These teaching procedures were systematic and meaningful vocabulary development, availability and use of a variety of instructional materials, appraisal of pupil attitudes toward reading, provision for constructive independent reading, development of purposes for reading, reading silently prior to oral reading, and adequate preparation by the teacher for the reading lesson.

Harris and Serwer discovered that teachers who were competent with a particular reading method and followed its prescriptions had higher achieving students in reading. In addition, they found that time devoted to reading instruction was positively correlated with students' reading achievement.

Four inner-city schools successful in teaching children to read were identified by Weber. He noted eight teacher characteristics common to these four schools. The characteristics were strong leadership, high expectations, good atmosphere, strong emphasis on reading, additional reading personnel, use of phonics, individualization, and careful evaluation of pupil progress.

Rupley first identified teachers who were effective in terms of their students' end-of-year reading achievement and looked at instructional processes which could account for the differences in relation to the effective and less effective teachers. He found that teachers who reported less emphases on oral reading skills and language development had higher achieving students than teachers who placed greater emphases on these areas. In addition, teachers who used ongoing diagnostic techniques and adapted their instruction to these diagnostic findings had higher achieving pupils in reading.

A similar procedure was adopted by Blair. He first identified teachers

associated with high and low achieving students in reading and then looked at the effort exerted by these teachers in the use of supplementary materials, differentiated instruction, records on student progress, and conferences dealing with individual student progress. Blair found significant differences in pupil end-of-year reading achievement in favor of the high effort teachers.

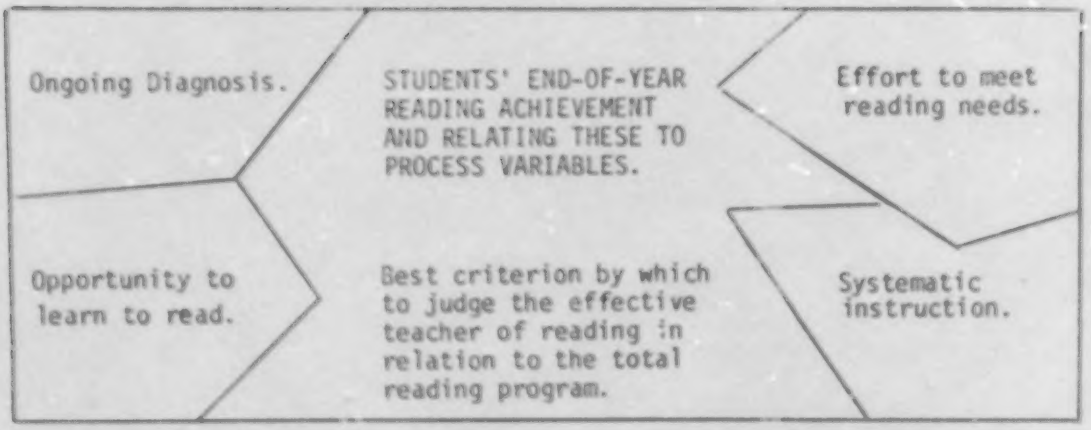
The major aim of a project conducted by the American Institutes for Research, commissioned by the Right to Read Office of the U.S. Office of Education, was to identify effective reading programs which had demonstrated improved pupil reading achievement. The results of this project have ramification for further delineating the effective teacher of reading. Although only nine elementary reading programs out of 728 were identified as being effective, the criteria which was used to determine effectiveness centered around the product for which reading teachers are directly responsible - cognitive and academic achievement.

In a review of the programs (Rupley, 1976), several components, in relation to teacher process and how this may have affected pupils' achievement, are evident. These similarities included closely monitoring students' progress through the program, establishing educational goals and objectives which related to observable outcomes, establishing the entering abilities of the students for comparison with terminal data, and developing instructional strategies and materials which dealt directly with the identified needs of the students.

Insert Figure One

As Figure 1 points out, the aforementioned research studies and effective reading programs are based around the concept of first identifying effective reading teachers in terms of students' reading achievement and then considering process variables (instructional strategies) which could

account for the students' achievement. The advantage of this research approach over approaches which identify variables and then attempt to establish a relationship to student achievement is that the variables under investigation deal more directly with those which relate to student achievement. This direct relationship is of paramount importance if progress is to be made toward identifying the effective reading teacher in relation to the total reading program. Hopefully, researchers will now take this direction. If they do, those people interested in reading instruction improvement will no longer have to deal with the "puzzle phenomenon" in their search for improved reading instruction.


Ongoing Diagnosis.
STUDENTS' END-OF-YEAR READING ACHIEVEMENT AND RELATING THESE TO PROCESS VARIABLES.
Effort to meet reading needs.
Opportunity to learn to read.
Best criterion by which to judge the effective teacher of reading in relation to the total reading program.
Systematic instruction.

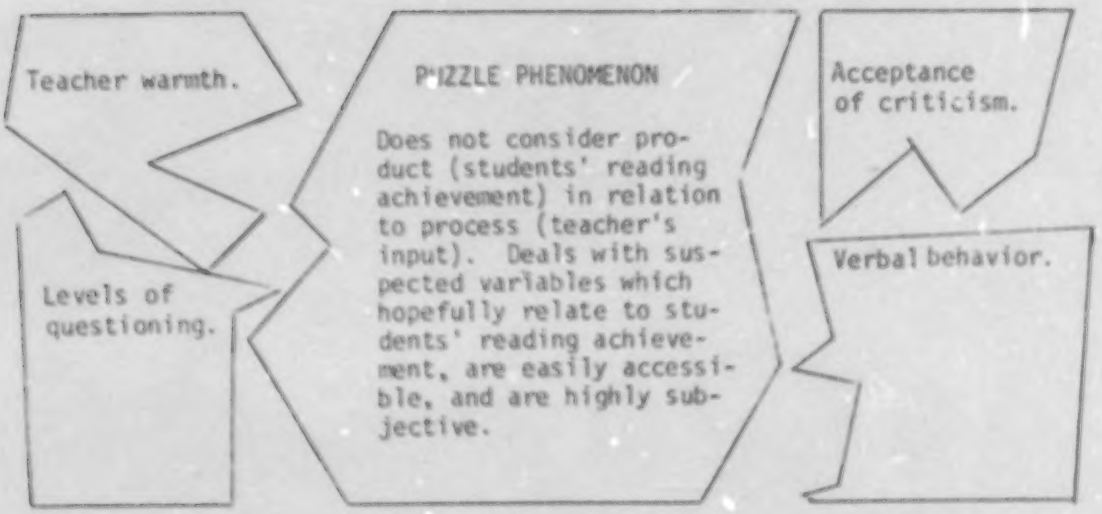

Teacher warmth.
PUZZLE PHENOMENON
Does not consider product (students' reading achievement) in relation to process (teacher's input). Deals with suspected variables which hopefully relate to students' reading achievement, are easily accessible, and are highly subjective.
Acceptance of criticism.
Verbal behavior.
Levels of questioning.

Figure 1. An example of research using credible process variables in relation to product compared with research results which perpetuate the puzzle phenomenon.

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